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ABSTRACT

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Technical Report No. 559

THE LITERACY ASSESSMENT OF SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

The first part of this report reviews the different types of formal assessment measures that have been used to evaluate the language and literacy performance of second-language learners of English in the United States, including language proficiency tests, reading readiness tests, standardized reading tests, basal reading tests, and statewide reading tests. The second part of the report explains informal assessment and describes the various types of classroom activities that teachers can use to evaluate and facilitate the literacy development of second-language students in both bilingual and non-bilingual settings. Activities presented include classroom observation, oral miscue analysis, story retellings, taperecordings of oral reading, reading logs, reading response logs, think-alouds, writing folders, and student-teacher conferences. The report concludes by noting some of the limitations of informal assessment and by pointing out that an informal assessment program can provide classroom teachers with a comprehensive profile of second-language students' literacy strengths and weaknesses.

THE LITERACY ASSESSMENT OF SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In an attempt to improve American students' academic performance, politicians and business leaders have called for the expanded use of national tests (Rothman, 1991). The assumption behind these calls is that national tests will encourage teachers to better prepare their students to learn. Although these formal assessment measures may provide legislators and the general public with test scores that can be compared on a statewide basis, it is extremely doubtful that their use will lead to a significant improvement in the literacy performance and instruction of language-minority students. In fact, for a variety of reasons, it is highly probable that these students as a group will continue to score lower on formal tests than will their monolingual peers (see Durán, 1983; García, 1991).

A serious problem with formal tests is that they seldom provide information about why a student scores poorly. For instance, standardized reading test scores do not differentiate among students' prior knowledge, reading strategies, or reasoning capabilities (Johnston, 1984; Royer & Cunningham, 1981). As a result, it is difficult to know if students do not perform well on a test because they don't know enough about the test's topics, cannot read the passages, or are unable to determine the "best" answers. In addition, formal reading tests in English do not reflect the diverse cultural and language knowledge of students who are learning English as a second language. A second-language student's test score does not reveal if the student scored poorly because she did not know all of the test vocabulary (in the instructions, text, or questions) or because she did not have the necessary test-taking or comprehension strategies. Perhaps more seriously, the test scores do not indicate what students can and can't do on authentic literacy tasks (for a discussion, see García & Pearson, 1991b). So, even if teachers want to use the students' test scores to help plan their instruction, the test scores really do not provide enough information to do so effectively.

To plan instruction, teachers need to know how students are approaching, interpreting, and engaging in authentic literacy tasks. Teachers working with second-language students also need to know how they are using their two languages to make sense of the literacy tasks before them. It is my thesis that informal assessment measures, sometimes termed *situated* or *dynamic* assessment, can provide a more comprehensive profile of the second-language learner's literacy strengths and weaknesses than can formal assessment measures.

In the first half of the report, I review the different types of formal assessment measures that have been used to evaluate the language and literacy performance of second-language students. In the second half, I discuss the merits of informal assessment and describe the various types of classroom activities that teachers could use to evaluate and facilitate the literacy development of second-language students. I conclude the report with some thoughts about the literacy assessment of second-language students.

Formal Assessment Measures

Many second-language children encounter formal tests even before they actually participate in their first day of school. For example, before she starts kindergarten, Marta, a child from a Spanish-speaking background, probably will be given a language proficiency test to evaluate her oral language proficiency in English and to decide whether she should be placed in a Spanish- or English-medium kindergarten. If she is placed in an English-medium classroom, her teacher might also give her a reading readiness test in English. When she is older, she periodically will take standardized reading achievement tests. If she is in a school district that uses a basal reading program, then she will complete basal reading tests. If Marta lives in one of the 41 states that have developed their own statewide reading achievement tests, then sometime while she is in school, she will take such a test (Pearson & Valencia, 1987).

Marta's experiences with formal tests will not be much different if she is placed in a bilingual or English-as-a-second-language program funded by the state or federal government. Throughout the program, she periodically will take English-language proficiency tests and standardized reading achievement tests in English to determine when she is capable of leaving the second-language program for the English-medium classroom.

The next section of this report takes a closer look at the types of tests Marta might be given. These tests include language proficiency tests, reading readiness tests, standardized reading achievement tests, basal reading tests, and statewide reading tests.[1]

Language Proficiency Tests

Language proficiency tests generally sample students' linguistic knowledge of a particular language. They frequently are used, along with other measures, to determine second-language children's language dominance or to determine when they are ready to perform in an English-medium classroom.

The tests tend to measure language skills that the test developers consider to be essential to language fluency. Almost all the tests assess students' knowledge of phonology (the pronunciation and identification of sounds), morphology (their knowledge of inflectional suffixes or word endings), syntax (how to structure sentences grammatically), and lexicon (vocabulary) (Seidner, 1981). For example, the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Oral Tests in English (Duncan & De Avila, 1985) evaluate students' ability to identify minimal pairs (e.g., the difference between *coat* and *goat*); to identify a picture of a vocabulary item (e.g., *house*); to correctly repeat phonemes in a word and sentence context (e.g., /f/ as in *f*our and the wol*f* is laug*h*ing); to identify an illustration of a sentence they have heard being read (e.g., *the men are sitting at the table*); and to retell a short story they have heard being read.[2]

Obviously, the extent to which the language proficiency test score measures an individual student's language competency depends on the degree to which the composite skills on the test reflect the student's actual language knowledge and experience. Some critics have pointed out that the tests do not capture how students use language in a variety of social contexts. Savignon (1983) argues that it is possible for students to score high on these tests, based on their grammatical competence in the language, but not know how to use the language in real life situations. For example, a student could score high on the test but not understand the teacher's instructions to perform a particular task nor comprehend his explanations about a new concept.

Cummins (1981, 1984) and Troike (1982) also warn that educators should not overrely on language proficiency test scores to determine when students know enough English to perform in an English-medium classroom. Their concern is based on the fact that the tests emphasize linguistic aspects of second-language children's speaking and listening development in English and provide very little information about their reading and writing development. Cummins reports that, based on their oral proficiency in English, many second-language children have been placed prematurely in all-English classrooms without the literacy development needed in their native language and in English to achieve academically. Although these children may appear to communicate well in oral English, many of them do not have the literacy development necessary to learn information from text.

A further limitation of the tests is that they do not reflect second-language children's emerging bilingualism. For instance, second-language children at the preschool and kindergarten levels may be acquiring English and their native language across different settings. As a result, some of these children may know some vocabulary concepts in one language but not in the other. Because language proficiency measures only evaluate the child's knowledge of one language at a time, they will underestimate the child's total knowledge.

Reading Readiness Tests

Reading readiness tests typically include subtests of letter recognition, shape perceptions, sound-symbol correspondences, and oral vocabulary. According to Stallman and Pearson (1990), the original purpose behind reading readiness tests was to determine who had the prerequisite skills necessary to learn to read. Teachers presumably were to use information from the tests to plan instruction for those children who were not ready to read. Today, the tests tend to be used for both placement and instructional purposes. Children who do not score high on the tests often are labeled language delayed, given additional help in speech, retained in kindergarten, or placed in a transitional kindergarten or first-grade classroom (Karweit, 1989).

Some reading readiness tests have been criticized for cultural bias because they use vocabulary and pictures representative of the middle-class Anglo (non-Hispanic white) experience (see Hall, Nagy, & Linn, 1984). In addition, many of the English versions assess children's prereading potential based on the children's pronunciation of standard English. If children are not orally fluent in English, they obviously will not score high on the English version on the test, even if they can accomplish many of the tasks measured by it.

Critics of reading readiness tests also argue that many of these tests evaluate children's readiness to read based on their performance on decontextualized tasks that are not reflective of emergent literacy (Edelsky & Harman, 1988; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Stallman & Pearson, 1990). For instance, few readiness tests attempt to assess whether children know how to approach reading and writing. Most of them do not indicate if children understand that the purpose of reading and writing is to construct meaning. In fact, Stallman and Pearson point out that the readiness concept contradicts the notion of children's developmental or emerging knowledge about literacy, and instead implies that children must go through discrete stages before they can engage successfully in beginning literacy tasks. In many cases, children who do not score high on the tests receive instruction that focuses on the isolated skills measured on the tests. The instructional consequence for children who do not already have a sense of print awareness may be dire: These children may learn how to perform the decontextualized tasks (such as calling out sounds) but not understand that the goal of reading is to construct meaning.

Another problem with the tests is that they do not reveal what bilingual children already know about reading and writing in one language that could be transferred to reading and writing in another language. For example, children who know their letter names in their native language probably will have an easier time learning letter names in their second language. Similarly, there is considerable evidence that children who already understand the function of reading in their native language have less difficulty learning to read in a second language than do children without this awareness (Downing, 1984; Modiano, 1973).

Standardized Reading Achievement Tests

Although educators from a variety of perspectives have warned against overrelying on standardized reading achievement test scores for placement and instructional purposes, this practice still continues (García, 1991). Educators frequently use the test scores to track or group students, assuming that by "homogeneously" grouping them, they are meeting their individual needs (García, Pearson, & Jiménez, 1990).

Standardized reading tests have been criticized because their format and content do not reflect current reading theory (Edelsky & Harman, 1988; Valencia & Pearson, 1987). Reading achievement tests in the lower grades (K-2) still tend to evaluate students' reading performance by totaling their scores on a variety of subtests that focus on isolated skills (vocabulary identification, sight-word reading, the matching of pictures with simple sentences, the comprehension of simple passages, and literal recall).

These tests are similar to reading readiness tests, except that instead of listening to sentences and short stories, the students read them (see Stallman & Pearson, 1990). Current versions of the tests in the upper grades (3-12) focus more on simulated reading. Students typically are required to read four to six short passages from a variety of genres (short stories, letters to the editor, poetry, advertisements, and expository text). Within a prescribed time period, they must answer a series of multiple-choice questions about each of the passages. The test scores reported usually are norm-referenced. That is, the score indicates the individual student's performance relative to that of other students who have taken similar versions of the test.

Valencia and Pearson (1987) contend that the tests do not reveal how students are orchestrating comprehension strategies to deal with real text. They do not acknowledge the role that prior knowledge plays in reading comprehension, except for the range of topics included to offset any cultural test bias that may be due to prior knowledge differences (Johnston, 1984; Royer & Cunningham, 1981). Because the test passages are brief, and frequently contrived, they lack the structural and topical integrity of authentic text. The questions on the tests are not based on inferencing and text structure taxonomies, and tend to overemphasize students' literal comprehension of the text. Valencia and Pearson argue that, in sum, the students' test scores represent their performance on a variety of subskills related to reading (literal recall, vocabulary recognition, and main idea identification). They provide little information about the reading strategies students use or whether students know how and when to apply these strategies to new situations.

In terms of second-language children, there are a variety of additional concerns. Several researchers point out that the use of standardized tests with second-language children may be less reliable and/or valid than with monolingual children (Durán, 1983; García, 1988). The test developers do not acknowledge that second-language children may not be as familiar with the topics included on the tests as their Anglo counterparts (see García, 1988, 1991), nor do they take into account the children's emerging language proficiency in English. For example, I found that even fifth- and sixth-grade bilingual Latino students, who had been enrolled in all-English classrooms for at least two years, were misled by the presence of paraphrased vocabulary in standardized reading test items. When I translated some of the key words paraphrased in the test questions into Spanish, then some of the students' answers demonstrated that they had understood the passages even though their performance on the multiple-choice questions suggested otherwise. For example, José (J) missed Question 48 because he did not recognize that *native environment* paraphrased the terms used in the passage (*freedom* and *free state*). Because he thought that the answer was not given in the passage, he guessed, choosing answer "a" instead of the correct answer, "c":

48. In their native environment, chimps
    a. hide in the daytime
    b. live alone
    c. roam freely
    d. stay in one place

When I (R) translated *native environment* into Spanish, then he correctly chose the answer:

R Eso quiere decir "ambiente natural" ("native environment")
J (*pause*) Roam freely. (García, 1991)

The latter finding is consistent with other research that has shown that bilingual students frequently produce more comprehensive recalls of text written in their second language when they are permitted to use their first language (see Eaton, 1980; Lee, 1986).

Other factors that adversely affect bilingual students' English reading test performance include the semantic content of key vocabulary, students' lack of familiarity with test-taking strategies, and speededness--the failure to complete the test due to prescribed time limitations (García, 1991). I found that the Latino students in my study were not always aware of the subtle nuances that contextualized the use of key vocabulary, nor were they familiar with the range of meanings embodied by some of the key vocabulary. In addition, many of the students thought that the answers to the test questions would be explicitly stated in the passages. Others did not bother to reread the passages to determine their answers because they thought that it would take too much time. Most of the students I interviewed seemed to need more time to complete the test than did the monolingual Anglo students. This is an interesting finding given that *true* bilinguals generally take longer to process text in either language than monolinguals, and especially take longer to process text in their second language than they do in their first (Chamot, 1980; Eaton, 1980; Mägiste, 1979).

Basal Reading Program Tests

Another type of reading achievement test frequently used in the classroom is that developed by basal reading program publishers. These tests, while similar in format to standardized tests, generally are criterion-referenced. They do not compare the student's performance to that of others, but instead compare it to a predetermined standard to see if the student's performance reflects a certain level of competency.

The content of these tests almost always reflects the types of skills and knowledge covered in the respective basal reading program. As a result, the tests tend to present reading as a series of skill-based components, reflective of the scope-and-sequence chart that underlies the development of the basal readers.

Although the tests may reflect the curriculum presented in the program, they do not always reveal how well children comprehend text. A content analysis of basal reading tests across Grades 1-6 (Foertsch & Pearson, 1987) indicated that only 30-50% of the test items dealt with aspects of reading comprehension. So, a high score on the test does not necessarily indicate that the student has developed a repertoire of comprehension strategies.

Clearly, the performance of second-language students on these tests is affected by many of the same factors that influence their performance on standardized reading tests. In addition, these tests assume that all the students taking them have had the same opportunity to acquire the vocabulary, topical knowledge, and skills presented in the series. Although second-language children enrolled in all-English classrooms may progress through the series, the extent to which they acquire the same vocabulary, topical knowledge, and skills as their monolingual counterparts may differ considerably, depending on the type of instruction they have received, their prior knowledge, and their English fluency (see García, 1988). Second-language children who have not used the same series obviously will be at a disadvantage on the program test, as will children recently moved out of a bilingual classroom into an all-English classroom. If the children's previous instructional program focused on authentic literacy tasks, then they probably will be unfamiliar with the decontextualized tasks that frequently are used on the tests to sample children's reading and writing development (Foertsch & Pearson, 1987; García & Pearson, 1991b).

Statewide Reading Tests

Many recent statewide tests have been developed in an attempt to reflect more accurately current reading theory. For example, the state reading tests in Illinois and Michigan assess students' prior knowledge of the reading passages; provide them with longer, noncontrived passages; ask questions tied to inferencing and text structure taxonomies; and evaluate students' awareness of reading strategies and

their attitude toward reading (Valencia & Pearson, 1987; Wixson, Peters, Weber, & Roeber, 1987). These changes clearly are major improvements in the wide-scale testing of reading.

On the other hand, the tests are based on the monolingual reader's experience, and, similar to standardized reading tests, do not take into account the unique factors that may affect the second-language student's English reading test performance (García, 1991). These unique factors include the range of topics on the tests, the extent to which unknown vocabulary is contextualized and defined in the passages, the use of paraphrasing in the test questions and answers, and the amount of time allowed to complete the test. Before the tests are heralded as better measures of second-language children's English reading, additional research needs to examine the relation between these children's literacy development and their reading performance on the tests. A major problem with the statewide tests, as with all formal tests, is that they do not take into account that second-language children may reveal greater comprehension of what they have read in their second language if they are allowed to use their first language.

The Merits of Informal Assessment

Informal assessment typically refers to teacher evaluation or classroom-based assessment of students. Until recently, informal assessment was not highly regarded by many researchers and educators because it did not result in *objective* measures of students' performance (see García & Pearson, 1991b). Literacy assessment primarily was thought of in terms of accountability, and not in terms of how it could inform the teacher's decision making regarding a particular student. Educators were interested in obtaining information that would allow them to compare student performance across sites. This goal meant that evaluative criterion needed to be used consistently across different student populations. Critics considered teacher evaluations of student performance to be "subjective" and not reliable because teachers do not always articulate and consistently apply the criterion they use for evaluation.

Second-language experts also were concerned about relying on teacher judgment to determine second-language children's language dominance or proficiency. Critics of informal language assessment pointed out that teachers didn't always know the languages the children spoke, nor were they knowledgeable about first- and second-language acquisition and bilingualism (August & García, 1988).

New theoretical views of literacy and learning have resulted in a shift in how informal assessment is viewed. The purpose behind assessment has widened to focus on teacher decision making: What do teachers need to know to make informed decisions regarding the literacy development of individual students in the classroom? This shift in perspective has been aided by the constructivist view of reading (García & Pearson, 1991b). Educators and researchers now are very interested in understanding children's attitudes toward reading and knowledge about reading. They specifically want to know how children approach reading tasks, the types of reading strategies they utilize, and the different factors (background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, interest, purpose for reading) that influence their reading comprehension; aspects of the reading process that are not readily reflected in formal assessment measures.

Similarly, the Vygotskian view of learning has focused attention on how learners construct and interpret academic tasks within a social context (Moll, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985). Specifically, researchers have become interested in understanding how more capable peers or adults can help to expand children's learning through scaffolding or guided participation. This theoretical orientation toward the reading process and social context of learning has meant that more educators are talking about the merits of *situated* or *dynamic* assessment (see Campione & Brown, 1987; Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, 1990).

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Situated assessment refers to assessment procedures that are situated or contextualized within the classroom (Valencia, McGinley, & Pearson, 1990). These procedures are developed by the teacher and can be used both to evaluate *and* facilitate children's academic performance and development. Unlike formal assessment measures that are almost always commercially produced and not necessarily an integral part of an individual teacher's ongoing instructional plan (for example, the teacher has to set aside time for testing), situated assessment activities are part of the classroom environment. The teacher's use of these activities does not take away from instructional time because the activities become a part of the instructional plan. Therefore, the use of informal assessment techniques in the classroom finesses the issue of authenticity that plagues many formal measures, because teachers can evaluate how well children approach and accomplish authentic literacy tasks. The assessment also takes into account the classroom context and what is relevant as well as reflective of the individual child's progress and learning.

Dynamic assessment is slightly different and could be provided in both a formal and informal context (Lidz, 1987). As a construct, it refers to the opportunity to document what children can and cannot do with additional help. When it is used in a situated context, it allows teachers to document the progress children are making with and without support from themselves or other peers.

Informal Assessment Activities

In deciding how to proceed in the classroom, teachers can ask themselves two questions:

1. What do I need to know about individual children's literacy and language development in order to plan their instruction?

2. What activities and tasks can I use to find out and record this information?

The response to the first question requires the teacher to reflect on the reading process and what she knows about second-language children's literacy development. For example, in terms of reading, it is helpful to know about children's interests and attitudes toward reading and how they define the reading task. It also is helpful to know the extent to which children can appropriately activate, maintain, and switch schemata; make appropriate inferences at the word, sentence, and text levels; vary their approach to text; monitor their comprehension; and utilize appropriate comprehension and repair strategies when their comprehension has gone awry (García & Pearson, 1991a). In terms of second-language children, it is helpful to know where these students are in their bilingual and biliterate development. Factors that may influence students' biliterate development include their attitudes toward reading in the two languages, their bilingual reading experiences and expertise, and their language development in the two languages.

The response to the second question requires the teacher to evaluate the usefulness of the different literacy activities that currently constitute her classroom instruction. In planning an informal assessment program, teachers need to decide which activities they will use to document certain aspects of the child's literacy development. Information gained from the use of informal assessment activities should help teachers plan instruction as well as provide them with a basis for student evaluation.

There are a variety of informal assessment techniques and measures that can be used in the classroom. Activities that may be particularly useful to teachers dealing with second-language students in both the bilingual *and* all-English setting include classroom observations, running records of students' oral reading, story retellings, taperecordings of oral readings, reading logs, reading response logs, think-alouds, writing folders, and student-teacher conferences.

Classroom Observation

Teacher observation frequently is touted as a way to keep track of students' literacy development. However, as Geneshi cautions (1985), teachers often are too busy to note everything that happens to individual students in a classroom. Anecdotal records and individual or group checklists are two ways that teachers can begin to systematically document their students' literacy development.

When a teacher uses an anecdotal record (see Bird, 1989; Geneshi, 1985), he records key observations as well as his interpretation of the events. He can do this on index cards, in a loose-leaf binder, or in a spiral notebook. Anecdotal records usually involve spontaneous observations about children's actual behavior. For instance, a teacher might note that Ming-Ling wrote her address in English for the first time, or that Ahmad seemed to have difficulty comprehending the volcano story because he did not appear to know what a volcano was. Once the teacher has made the initial observation, he then follows through with his observation, noting related events on subsequent days.

Another way teachers can record their observations is by using checklists (Dalrymple, 1989; Hood, 1989). In most cases, the teacher will list on the checklist certain categories that she is interested in observing. As she is using the checklist, she may modify it to reflect more accurately her children's progress. To facilitate their use, checklists can be placed on clipboards and located in strategic spots throughout the classroom. They can be used to document individual children's progress or a group of children's progress.

Different types of skills can be listed on the checklists, taking into account the children's grade level, literacy development, and bilingualism. For instance, teachers can use a checklist to document the progress that bilingual children are making in recognizing and using English. If the teacher does not speak the child's native language, she can ask the child's parents or a bilingual aide or peer to tell her what the child does know in the native language. If she is told by the parents that the child knows how to identify colors in the native language, she might note when the child first demonstrated that she/he recognized comparable English words (such as *red*, *blue*, *green*) by following oral or written instructions that used these words. She might also record when the child first said the words, read them, and/or included them in her or his own writing. Another way to use checklists is to note how frequently individual children choose to read or write during free time, documenting the extent to which the children read and write in their native language or English. Teachers also can use them to record the extent to which individual children ask or answer different types of inferencing questions. They can note if children are able to answer questions with or without their help or that of their peers.

Through classroom observation, and the use of anecdotal records or checklists, teachers can keep track of students' progress throughout the school year. Used creatively, anecdotal records and/or checklists can help to provide a more complete picture of the bilingual child's emerging second-language proficiency and literacy development. For example, both bilingual and monolingual teachers can use them to record the progress that bilingual children are making by documenting when the children experience difficulties with English vocabulary concepts and/or syntax, what type of help is offered to help them resolve the difficulties, how the children respond, and when the item no longer presents a difficulty.

Oral Miscue Analysis of Students' Oral Reading

Bilingual and monolingual teachers also can conduct oral miscue analyses of students' oral reading to determine the different types of reading strategies the students employ (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). This requires some advance planning in that the teacher needs to have a transcript of the text in front of him. As the student reads, the teacher notes on the text any repetitions, substitutions, insertions, omissions, or self-corrections that she or he makes. Analysis of these data tells the teacher

the extent to which the student is using graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and discourse cue systems. A more thorough analysis would include asking the student to retell what was read (see story retelling below).

If a monolingual English-speaking teacher isn't sure if a student's miscue represents a pronunciation error or a developmental error due to the child's second-language status, then he should ask the child a clarification question to see if the child understood what he or she read (García & Pearson, 1991b). If the teacher is bilingual, or if he has access to a bilingual aide, it would be helpful to conduct oral miscue analyses of the students' reading in their two languages. This would be one way to safeguard against being misled by bilingual students' less-than-fluent oral English. Although bilingual children may encounter difficulties with unfamiliar vocabulary or syntactic structures, those who are literate in their native language typically can use their native-language reading expertise to approach reading in their second language. If these students understand that the purpose of reading is to construct meaning, then they will tend to make fewer uncorrected graphophonic miscues (not say *horse* for *house* when it is clear that house does not make sense) than a student who is not particularly literate in either language (see Hudelson, 1981).

Story Retellings

Teachers can also ask students to retell what they have read (Morrow, 1989). As the student retells the story, the teacher has a story map in front of her, and quickly checks off those points that the student has included in the retelling. A simple story map typically includes headings that focus on the story setting (time, place, and principal characters), the problem/goal, initiating event, plot events/episodes, and resolution of the problem/goal (for examples of story maps, see Muth, 1989; Tierney, Readance, & Dishner, 1990). Obviously, some stories will require more complex story maps. After the child has finished the retelling, the teacher could ask probing questions to elicit additional information about the story that the child might not have included. If the child has varied from the story in the retelling, the teacher could review the story with the child to understand what precipitated the deviation. This type of procedure could provide her with useful information about where and how the child's comprehension has gone awry.

In working with second-language students, teachers need to remember that many of these students will give fuller accounts of what they read if they are allowed to use their first language or to code-mix when they do not know or cannot recall key vocabulary terms in English (García, 1991). If the teacher is a monolingual English speaker, she could taperecord the student's retelling and then ask a bilingual parent, aide, or tutor to listen with her to the student's retelling. The bilingual participant could translate for the teacher what the student has said in the native language, and together the monolingual teacher and bilingual participant could determine what the student understood.

Another option is to allow second-language students of varying English proficiency and from the same language background to do story retellings in pairs or small groups. The students first read the story silently. Then, the teacher gives one of them a completed story map with relevant information from the story listed on it. One student retells the story, while the other student listens, checking off the information on the already completed story map. The two students then discuss the parts of the story that the first student did not understand by referring back to the story and noting on the story map unknown terms, concepts, or syntactic structures. The students then could switch roles with a different story. This technique allows the teacher to understand what the students are comprehending at the same time that it provides additional information about the problems that they face in reading English. Because the students are allowed to use English and their native language, it also provides the teacher with valuable information about the students' emerging English language proficiency and biliterate status.

Taperecordings of Oral Reading

Teachers periodically can have students taperecord their oral reading (Routman, 1988). Ideally, students should be given the option to choose the selection they want to read, to rehearse it, and, when ready, to taperecord their performance. Tapes of children's oral reading would provide the teacher with information about the child's expressive reading and reading fluency. By reviewing the set of tapes the child recorded over the semester or year, the teacher also could note the different types of readings that the child chose to submit.

If the child is biliterate, the teacher could suggest that the child make tapes in both languages. Although the teacher might not understand the child's native language, listening to her or his oral reading in that language, and reviewing the book the child read, would give the teacher some understanding about what level the child felt capable of reading in his native language. It also would encourage the child to read in both languages, helping to promote the child's biliteracy and validate the worthiness of the home language in a school context.

Reading Logs

The teacher could ask all of the students in the class to keep a record of the different types of materials that they were reading (Atwell, 1987; Routman, 1988). Teachers using reading logs typically ask their students to record the author and title of each story and book they read, noting the date when they completed it. The teachers then periodically review the logs, noting the types of materials the students are reading and the individual progress they are making.

If teachers are working with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they should be encouraged to expand the categories listed in the logs to include newspaper and magazine articles, letters, and other types of literacy materials that might be more common in some of the students' homes (Edwards & García, 1991). Second-language students should be asked to list what they are reading in both of their languages, at school and at home. This would encourage them to read both in and out of school.

Reading Response Logs

Reading response logs are notebooks in which students record their individual responses to what they have been silently and/or orally reading (Atwell, 1987; Routman, 1988). The teacher might give the students specific instructions about what they are to include in their logs, or she might allow the children to write about what they see as important in the story. Teachers who use reading response logs in their classrooms generally collect them from students on a rotating basis. Teachers may respond in writing to the students' entries or discuss them with students in conferences.

The response log provides the teacher with information about how the students are synthesizing and interpreting information from their reading. The logs also allow the teacher to see what the students are reading, and what they think is particularly noteworthy or important. At the same time, the teacher can use the logs to monitor and aid the students' writing development. In short, both reading and writing performance can be enhanced and assessed with this activity.

Through the response log, a teacher can also observe her students' biliterate development. If she encourages her students to read and write in both languages, she can note the types of materials that the children are reading in their two languages. If she is a monolingual English speaker, she can ask her bilingual students to work together or with an English-speaking child to translate or write some of their responses in English. Over time, she can observe the students' written development in English.

Think-Alouds

Teachers also can ask students to engage in think-alouds (Tierney, Readance, & Dishner, 1990). Think-alouds work best when they have first been modeled by the teacher. For example, a teacher can share how she is making sense out of a text by orally or silently reading a text and interrupting the reading to talk about her thought processes. The teacher might say the following:

> "The title suggests that this story will be about a craft fair. I'll read on to see."
>
> ...
>
> "Oops, I don't know what this word *fuliginous* means. Maybe if I read more, I can figure it out."
>
> ...
>
> "Oh, I guess my original prediction wasn't correct. It's about an oven not a craft fair."

The easiest type of think-aloud to use is a prompted think-aloud, where the teacher has used her knowledge of narrative or expository text to mark the text with an asterisk at key points in the text. The student reads the text, either orally or silently, and stops reading when he or she reaches the star. At this point, the teacher usually asks the student to explain to her what he or she has read, to identify any problems that he or she has had in comprehending the text, and to predict what he or she anticipates reading in the subsequent section. If the student's explanation about what was read does not conform to what the teacher expected, then, the teacher might ask the student, "How did you determine that?" or "Can you show me where you got that idea?" In the process of using the think-aloud, teachers also can individually help students monitor their reading. For example, if a student misinterprets a vocabulary term, the teacher can ask the student to reread several sentences where the term was used in context. Then, she can say, "Based on these sentences, what do you think the term means?" Or, if a student is not self-monitoring, the teacher can ask the student, "Given what you've read, does what you said make sense?" The interactive nature of the think-aloud, with its emphasis on student's active construction of meaning, also sends students the message that reading is a strategic activity that involves using what you know in concert with the text.

Think-alouds can be particularly informative when used with second-language students. Through this type of dialogue, the teacher can discover not only the types of challenges that students encounter with the text, but also how they deal with such challenges. For example, the teacher might discover that Rafael relied on one meaning of a word when another meaning was called for. Or, Shobha misinterpreted the text because she was not familiar with key vocabulary or she activated inappropriate schemata. Once teachers are aware of these problems and how they affect students' engagement with the text, they can deal with the problems in their classroom instruction.

Think-alouds also can be used with small groups of students. In this case, the teacher can set up a taperecorder so that students taperecord their interactions as they work together to complete a prompted think-aloud. In a subsequent session, the teacher can review the tape with the students, asking them to explain the challenges they faced and to what extent they resolved them. Again, teachers need to understand that second-language students may use both languages in the process of constructing meaning from the text.

Think-alouds require planning, but can be used with students periodically throughout the school year. Dated taperecordings of the think-alouds provide the teacher with an ongoing record of student progress.

Writing Folders

Writing folders include samples of students' written work collected over a period of time (Routman, 1988). Teachers should encourage students to keep their drafts, revisions, and final copies in the folders, as well as work in progress (García & Pearson, 1991b). The folder can contain formal as well as informal pieces of work. The latter might include written activities that relate to the students' reading and English language development, such as story maps about particular stories, graphic organizers or flow charts, notes for research papers, and students' own vocabulary lists or personal dictionaries. Even very young children can produce *writing*, which, although less sophisticated, demonstrates their emerging literacy. For example, young children can title or describe their drawings as well as write their own stories by using invented spellings. Dating the work and storing it in a portfolio allows the teacher to keep a running account of the child's progress.

Writing folders allow teachers to see a slightly different aspect of their bilingual children's language/literacy development. Folders indicate to the teacher the extent to which the children are using their two languages to construct meaning. Accordingly, bilingual children should be free to use both languages to plan and revise text and be encouraged to keep these versions in their folders, although monolingual English-speaking teachers may want to see a final product in English. If the students do a lot of writing, and the teacher does not want to review it all, he can ask the students to select what they consider to be their best work. Students can then give the teacher the final product, as well the various drafts that went into its preparation. The teacher needs to see how the student progressed throughout the writing process if he is to further the student's writing development. Self-selection gives the students the opportunity to participate in their own evaluation. Teachers need to provide students with this opportunity if they want students to view reading and writing as communication and to self-monitor their own reading and writing.

Student-Teacher Conferences

Individual conferences between the student and teacher provide an opportunity to set goals and to discuss the student's progress (Atwell, 1987; Routman, 1988). Together, the student and teacher can review some of the documents produced by the informal assessment program. The teacher can ask the student to explain how she or he approached and completed some of the key tasks. Personal conversations with students about their work gives teachers the opportunity to find out more about the students' attitudes toward and interest in reading. In addition, teachers can use the time to ask students how they view their progress in the two languages. They also can ask individual students to identify what they currently are finding easy and difficult to do. This type of procedure may uncover unique problems or questions that teachers never anticipated.

Some Final Thoughts

Teachers need to understand why many second-language students will not score high on formal literacy measures in English. This does not mean that formal literacy measures cannot be used, but that they need to be used cautiously and in concert with informal assessment measures. García and Pearson (1991b) caution that formal tests, at their best, are *samples of performance*. What they sample clearly depends on their purpose and theoretical framework. How well they sample second-language students' literacy knowledge depends on the extent to which they reflect the students' literacy development, varied levels of bilingualism, and diverse vocabulary and background knowledge. Because formal literacy tests in English often underestimate the reading performance of second-language students (see García, 1991), teachers of these students need to look beyond these tests to understand their students' literacy performance.

One of the features of an informal assessment program is that it provides multiple indices of performance over a period of time. In a sense, the multiple indices offer the teacher multiple lenses through which to view the child. To understand the child's literacy performance through these lenses, teachers need to find out as much as they can about the child's literacy experiences in their first and second languages at home and at school. Without this information, and without a willingness to allow children to continue to use their two languages to construct meaning, teachers will replicate many of the problems inherent in using formal assessment measures.

Further, the informal assessment measures I have discussed rely heavily on students' willing participation in the activities delineated. Comparative ethnographic studies of children's interaction patterns and literacy events at home and at school suggest that not all children are comfortable with the activities described (see García & Pearson, 1991b). To offset this problem, teachers need to be careful observers, watching how students interact with them and their peers. They especially need to widen "the range of explanations they consider as they try to understand why some students are not performing well in the classroom" (García & Pearson, 1991b, p. 270). Teachers and administrators need to be open to input from the students' parents or other community or school personnel who know the students' language and culture. Teachers also need to maintain a risk-free classroom setting where students know it is all right to say that they do not understand a concept, how a term is used, or why they are to perform a task in a particular way. Without this type of classroom environment, it will be difficult for teachers to accurately document how their students are constructing meaning from text.

Finally, informal assessment relies on the teacher's expertise. Teachers who are interested in informal assessment have to be knowledgeable about the literacy process. Informal assessment provides one means for teachers to find out the strengths and weaknesses of their students' ongoing literacy development. However, teachers must know how to interpret this data. This means that teachers take on additional responsibility. If they work with second-language children, then they need to make a concerted effort to become knowledgeable about first and second-language acquisition and literacy processes. They also need to find out as much as they can about their students' language use and culture. Without this type of knowledge, informal assessment methods will be no more useful than formal assessment methods.

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Footnotes

[1]Much of the discussion on reading tests (standardized, basal, and statewide) is based on García (1991) and García and Pearson (1991b).

[2]The LAS battery does include an optional subtest on pragmatics (in which the teacher rates how the child has used the language in different classroom contexts) and a separate set of tests to assess second-language students' reading and writing in English or Spanish. Scores from the subtest and the reading and writing tests, however, are not calculated as part of the language proficiency score that the student receives.

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